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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: SCIENTOLOGISTS, JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES HAVE
CONTRASTING VIEWS ON PROGRESS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: On April 22, USAID's State and Society Advisor met with representatives of the Church of Scientology and the Jehovah's Witnesses in Almaty. The two organizations offered contrasting views of progress on religious freedom and government interference in their activities. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) The Church of Scientology began its activities in Kazakhstan in 1996, in Almaty. The Church claims 10,000 members in Almaty, and about 15,000 additional members nationwide. The Church also claims to have an ethnic composition of approximately 50 percent ethnic Russians and 50 percent members of other nationalities. Church Member Anastasia Minayeva and other staff with whom the USAID Advisor met alleged that the Church is under great pressure from the Government of Kazakhstan. Last year, the Church received visits from procurators, tax authorities, and eventually the Committee for National Security (KNB). Procurators opened a case against the Church because of its use of vitamin supplements in conjunction with sauna therapy. According to the Church, the vitamin/sauna practice is common in Scientology and used to "detoxify" the body.

14. (SBU) Scrutiny by the procurator's office led to a raid on a Church of Scientology on October 8, the Scientologists said. The Scientologists claimed that all of their "confessional files" were taken. Confessional files are the written comments of a Church member "auditing" another church member. This involves recording responses to questions posed by a Church member, which are kept in a confidential file. Members cannot continue their confessionals without the confiscated files, and the information also needs to be analyzed by a higher Church member so that progress and spiritual health of church members can be tracked. Minayeva stated that she suspected that the raids occurred because the Government of Kazakhstan believes that they are an instrument of the United States, and possibly a subversive organization. (COMMENT: There are indications that the government may believe that the Church is engaged in profit-making business activities inconsistent with its status as a religious organization. END COMMENT.) Minayeva stated

that the Church is funded entirely by donations and income derived from sources originating in Kazakhstan, and the Church does not receive funding from foreign sources.

CONFISCATED MATERIALS

15. (SBU) The Church is still in operation, but the Scientologists say that recently local authorities confiscated electronic devices called "e-meters" used in "auditing" sessions. The e-meter is a device placed in the hands of Church members and used to measure electrical impulses in response to "auditing" questions. Auditing is a practice much like a one-on-one counseling session. The Church uses "auditing" to measure the spiritual progress of individual Church members. According to Church representatives, the Kazakhstani authorities claimed that the technology could be used as a lie detector, a claim which is denied by the Church. The files that were confiscated contain personal data, and may only be returned if the individual requests his or her personal file from the authorities. In Scientology, an individual usually does not have access to his or her own file, and it is usually only reviewed by those trained by the Church, the Scientologists explained.

SIGNS OF HOPE

16. (SBU) Church members described the current situation as not particularly good, but believe that there are some positive signs for them in Kazakhstan. A small branch of the Church did receive all of its confiscated files back, and all Church members were allowed to individually petition the courts. Court hearings are scheduled for May, and Church members believe they will receive court decisions within the same month. Church members also believe that the mass media is now less negative about their activities, although members did cite a negative report about the Church of Scientology published the previous week. Church leadership is in contact with the Helsinki Commission, the United States Council on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), as well as the OSCE.

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Church members believe that the international spotlight of Kazakhstan's 2010 OSCE chairmanship may lead to improved short-term prospects for the Church in Kazakhstan.

JEHOVAHS WITNESSES

17. (SBU) Jehovah's Witnesses have reportedly existed in Kazakhstan since the 1940s, when Witnesses were deported from Ukraine and Moldova and sent to Central Asia. The current ethnic composition of the religious group in Kazakhstan includes Ukrainians, Moldovans, Kazakhs, and Germans. The religious group claims it has a growth rate in Kazakhstan of about four percent per year. The growth rate is partly attributed to conversions, but mostly to the growth in family size of members. The meeting with the USAID Advisor was conducted at the Jehovah's Witnesses' state-of-the-art facility in Almaty, with a representative from Germany, Arno Tungler, and a local staff attorney, Yuri Toporov.

18. (SBU) According to Tungler, religious freedom has improved in Kazakhstan for the Witnesses, following the closure of at least three of their communities by the government from 2006 to 2008. Tungler stated that in previous years "traditional religions" may have used political influence with local authorities to put pressure on groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, a 2008 letter from the Procurator General's Office (PGO) supporting the Witnesses' legal claims improved the situation, as well as direct engagement with the Presidential Human Rights Commission. The letter from PGO was produced in agreement with the Presidential Human Rights Commission. Tungler also stated that the organization directly engages the Government of Kazakhstan concerning its work, and that overall, its meetings with government officials have been positive. Tungler attributed these positive actions to a clear decision on the part of the Government of Kazakhstan to avoid negative press in light of the OSCE chairmanship.

19. (SBU) Tungler also believes that the Witnesses' established and lengthy presence in Kazakhstan, with 16,000 members registered throughout the country and in every province, is partly responsible

for improving acceptance of the religious group. Other members present stated that they were not interested in the total number of converts, but were more interested in the quality of converts. They explained that conversion sometimes can take two to three years. Moreover, conscientious objection to military service, which was a problem a decade ago, has not been a problem for the last five to six years. Also, no Jehovah's Witness is in prison, and there are no active cases in the courts against the religious group. All previous cases were decided in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses and have set a precedent for other similar actions against religious minorities.

MILAS